

Background

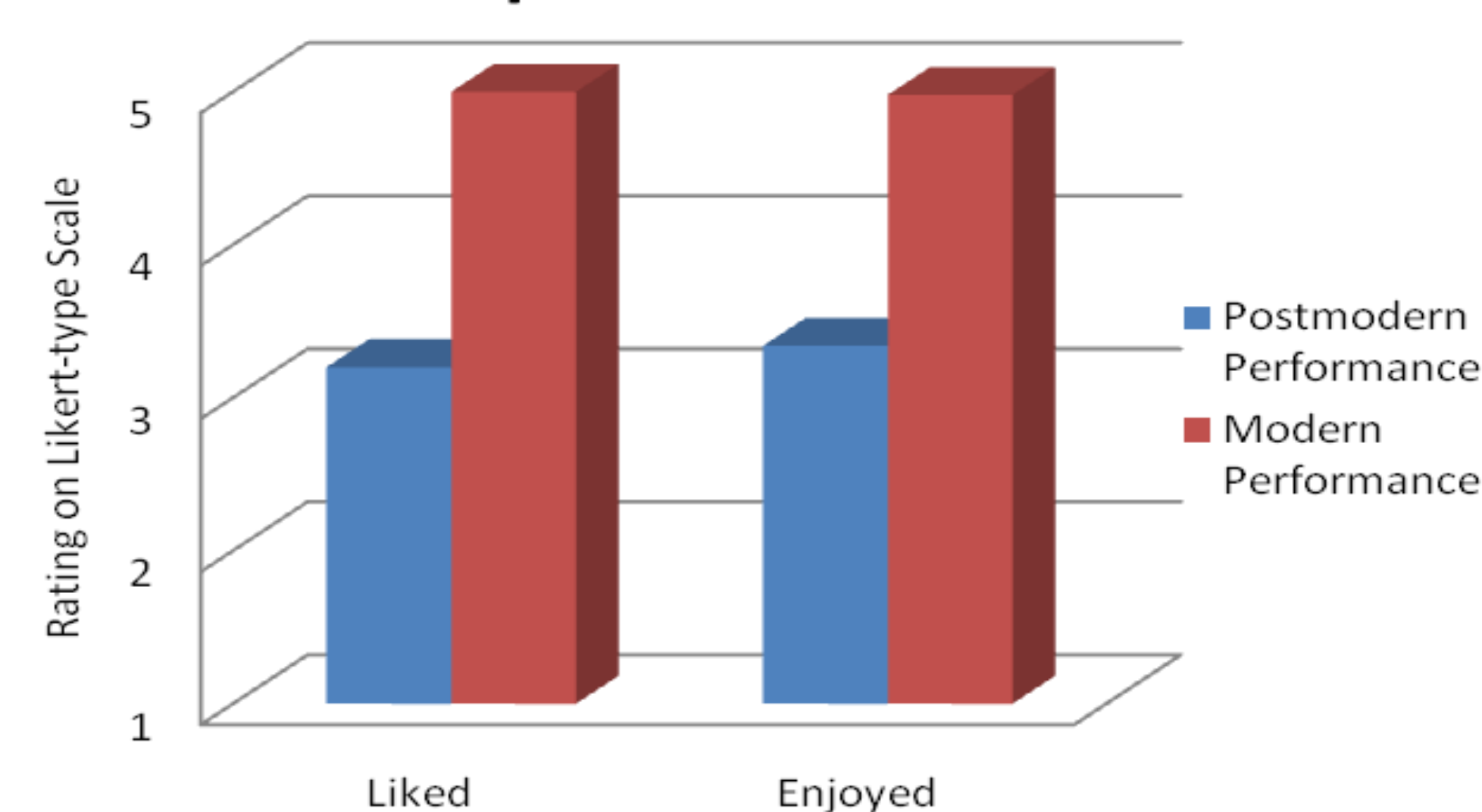
- A postmodern view of music was introduced with Cage's (1952) composition entitled *4'33"* (Hamm, 1997; Shultis, 1996; Lockhead, 2001). In *4'33"*, Cage rejects the traditional view of silence as the absence of sound created and controlled by the performer and adopts the postmodern view of silence as dynamic events created by the audience. The performer of *4'33"* does not make intentional sound for four minutes and thirty-three seconds while he or she sits on stage and holds a musical instrument or sits in front of a piano. The audience does not evaluate the performance as outsiders; rather, they become part of the performance. (Shultis, 1996; Kahn, 1997). The composition is assumed to draw attention to sound created not by the performer but by members of the audience (Carroll, 1994).

- The general consensus of a concert setting is that unintentional sounds should be minimized (Kahn, 1997). In other words, silence, defined as the absence of intended sounds (Kahn, 1997), is the antithesis of music. According to Victor Hugo, "Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to remain silent" (Hugo, 1894/1911, p. 58). In a modern view of music, Silence unilaterally and predictably alters the musical elements of timbre, duration, pitch, and frequency (Kahn, 1997; Margulis, 2007). This view of silence, purposefully controlled by the performer, reflects a modern philosophy of musical performance that began with Baroque form and style and continued throughout the rock and roll era (King & Sapner, 2008).

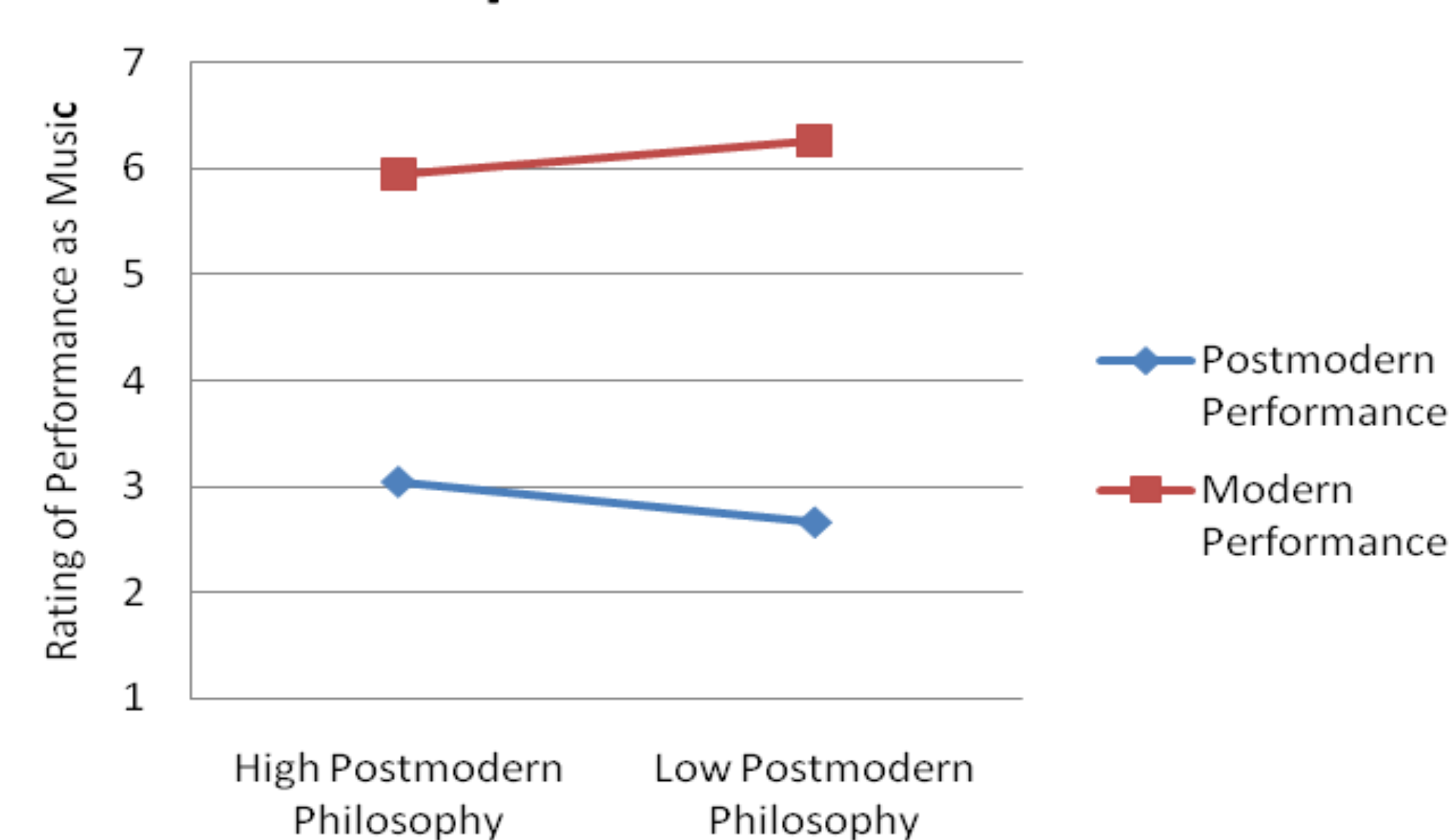
Purpose

The current study sought to identify social and cultural factors that affect a person's enjoyment of, liking for, and recall of sounds heard during a performance of silence as music. Situational factors including priming condition and type of music performed were examined along with the personal factor of life philosophy.

Response to Performance



Acceptance of Silence as Music



Method

- Baseline measures of personal adherence to postmodern beliefs were collected on 555 students using a 97-item survey on a Likert-type scale.
- Of the 555 students who completed the survey, 267 voluntarily participated in the experimental session and were assigned to attend a performance of modern music or a postmodern performance of silence.
- Participants were randomly assigned to be primed with tenets of modern or postmodern philosophy. A control group was also established.
- A man sitting in a wingback chair in a library was viewed on a television screen delivering a pre-recorded prime to the audience.
- Each group viewed their respective prime and exited the Music Hall. The groups were collectively invited back into the Music Hall to experience a modern or postmodern performance.
- The modern piece performed was Alexandre Guilmant's *Morceau Symphonique*. This piece was chosen because Guilmant has a mastery of form and attention to detail in construction (Alcock, 1911) and was cut to resemble *4'33"* in time and structure.
- The postmodern piece was John Cage's *4'33"*, also known as the silent piece (Kahn, 1997). This piece consists of three movements of varying time adding up to four minutes and thirty-three seconds (Cage, 1960). The first, second, and third movements were 36", 2'01", and 1'56", respectively. A straight mute was used in the postmodern condition to help the participants distinguish the second movement from the first and third.
- Following the performance participants were asked to complete the post-performance survey. As students turned in completed surveys, the experimenters thanked them for their participation in the study.

Sample excerpts from priming conditions

- Modern:** "All music includes four distinct ingredients: frequency, loudness, duration, and pitch. Combined, these four parts create a musical masterpiece with clear, identifiable structure. If silence exists during a song it is intended to be used as a musical tool to accentuate the intended meaning and to punctuate the musical phrases. It can cause the composition to progress to a climax or come to a resolution. Consequently, included in, but apart from music, silence should be heard, analyzed, and incorporated in the search for the ultimate meaning of the piece.
- Postmodern:** "The only rule in writing music is that there are no rules. Any meaning associated with a song is purely subjective because each performance of a piece is different from the last. If a composer writes a piece of music including silence, the goal is to take the write out of the music. The composer's personal beliefs, likes, and dislikes should not influence what the audience hears in any way. Therefore, silence should be listened to intently. Music is supposed to be creative and playful. As a result, it should be enjoyed.
- Control:** Please take a seat. The performance will begin in just a moment.

The video used for priming showed a man sitting in a wingback chair in a library was viewed on a television screen delivering a pre-recorded prime to the audience.

Results

- A 3 (Priming) X 2 (Type of Performance Attended) X 2 (Postmodern Philosophy) ANOVA revealed significant main effects for type of performance attended and for priming.
- Regardless of priming condition or personal philosophy, participants preferred the modern performance of music to the postmodern performance of silence as music.
 - Although priming did not result in increased liking for or enjoyment of the performance of silence, priming did lessen confusion for all participants.
 - Although participants expressing greater levels of agreement with principles of postmodernism did not enjoy the silent piece any more than the modern thinkers enjoyed it, they appear to show less distinction or concern for that which they are willing to label music.
 - Participants experiencing a performance of silence recalled more environmental sounds than participants experiencing a modern performance. At the same time, however, these participants said they paid less attention, listened less, and found less meaning in the performance.

Discussion

- Although attempting to define, discover, or create a taxonomy for postmodernism violates the postmodern premise of indeterminacy (Hassan, 1981), submitting data about postmodernism to hypothesis testing mandates the use of the modernist's approach to discovery, that is, the scientific method.
- Without a schema that can assimilate a performance of silence with expectations for a musical performance, the audience was expected to perceive incongruity that would motivate individuals to stop listening. Mandler's (1984) Schema Incongruity Model, adapted by Garver and Mandler (1987) for music, suggests that music that does not fit into an existing schema will not be assimilated by the listener. In Western concert settings, it is the privilege of the powerful to create sound and the duty of those lower in rank to remain quiet (Bijsterveld, 2001). Cagean silence reverses culturally mandated privilege in a concert setting. A muted performer inviting sound from his or her audience is incongruous with standard concert etiquette.
- The findings in this study support the Schema Incongruity Model. Regardless of the participants' feelings about the performance, the participants attending a performance of silence accomplished the goal Cage himself set forth, that of exposing the audience to environmental, unintentional sounds. Although silence clearly was not perceived as music in this study, it did direct participants' attention to peripheral sounds. Ironically, the goals of a postmodern composer were identified through a modern, empirical, scientific study of his work.

Effect of Priming

